

Creating the Future
By Bela H. Benathy and Gordon Rowland
Chapter 2: Why worry?

2. Why worry?

This is the most heinous of crimes
This is the deadliest of sins
The greatest violation of all times
Mother of us all
Place of our birth
We are all witness to the rape of the world

Tracy Chapman

The sky is falling

Chicken Little

Every day we hear someone say that actions proposed by governments and businesses will cause harm. We hear that the environment will be damaged or that the economy will suffer. We're told that freedoms are in jeopardy or that morality has collapsed. Every now and then someone will even claim that the world is about to end.

How many times have we heard such warnings, then found things to be okay? It seems that fear of the unknown continually drives some of us to see doom just over the horizon. We look at a new development, like a new technology or a proposed change in governmental policy, and we imagine the worst outcomes to which it might lead. Then when those outcomes don't happen we do the same thing when the next one comes along.

So why should we pay any attention to those who claim that today's social and environmental problems are critical? When so many predictions of doom have proven false, some even silly, why should we listen? Why should we worry?

We should worry because we're starting to *get* it and what we *get* tells us that the world is in trouble and it's our fault. We've made huge leaps in our understanding of how the world works. That understanding reveals clear signs that the paths we are taking are leading to social and environmental problems on a scale greater than at any previous time in history. We now understand why other doomsday predictions didn't come true, but, at the same time, we understand why it is almost inevitable that we will run into the hazards ahead if we don't change course.

Sure, we can debate about the severity and timetable of global warming. We can claim that ice melting at the poles is part of a natural cycle. We can frown at the danger of nanotechnology (miniature

computing) replicating itself and wiping out all other life. But there are fundamental changes happening on the planet that cannot be disputed. The human population is growing exponentially and much faster than we can increase our food supply. Plant and animal species are disappearing forever at an enormous rate, primarily because our actions have changed their habitats faster than they can adapt. These are facts that we cannot escape from. We need to worry because our world is threatened and our actions—what each and every one of us does or does not do on a daily basis—are to blame.

Consequently, we face some hard choices. We can bet that future developments in science and technology will solve our problems before it's too late—they've done it before. We can leave things to the "experts" in government, business and industry—that's what they're paid for. We can plead ignorance and carry on as if there were nothing to fear— isn't life tough enough already? But our developments in science and technology have leapt past the social and ethical developments necessary to control them. Our "experts" have proven themselves ignorant of consequences outside the domains of their expertise. And we cannot pretend that the forces we've set in motion will stop themselves if we look away. Instead, our only reasonable choice is to take charge—to change the directions we're heading through individual and collective action.

This book is about how we can make these changes and how we can create a future that we desire. We'll look at how we humans came to be the way we are, where present paths are taking us, what forces seem to be at work, and how and where we can make a difference. We'll try to do this by responding to a series of simple, yet powerful questions. The first is "Why worry?" or perhaps "What's in it for me?" The answer is that this is a critical time in history. Now more than ever before, the understandings we've acquired and the power we've gained to influence global events place the future of our species and our world squarely on our shoulders.

Here is another way to put it. We're facing a new reality, one of massive societal changes that touch the lives of every individual, community, and nation. This new reality raises questions: Are we only spectators of these changes? Are we destined to be their victims? Do we have to leave decisions affecting our lives to others? Are we at the mercy of "social engineers" and politicians who design systems and laws for us? The answer we will develop in this book is a resounding NO.

To get started, here are the two basic concepts we will work with: evolutionary consciousness and conscious evolution.

Evolutionary consciousness – knowing about change

Whether we choose to believe in a creator or not, we have to accept the fact that we are not today what we once were. There is abundant evidence and wide agreement that the human species has evolved over time, both biologically and culturally. Our bones and posture are different than they were millions of years ago. The ways we relate and communicate with one another and the things we do are different as well.

Until recently, this evolutionary process was very slow. Migration and climate changes resulted in physical adaptation (changes in our bodies) and influenced how we behaved. New materials and tools were introduced that changed how food was gathered or cultivated. But these changes happened over thousands, even millions of years. Not so anymore.

In the past few centuries there has been an enormous shift in the speed and nature of change. For example, because of recent advances in medicine we are physically larger and live longer than ever before, and this has happened over decades rather than thousands of years. In fact, the forces driving change have now become cultural, not biological. We're changing the nature of our species by how we choose to live, not by any process of biological adaptation or selection. We're even asking the question whether life is purely biological. For example, could a human consciousness take non-human form and reside in a machine?

There are several key concepts that are important to understanding evolution. We'll introduce two here.

First is the fact that *everything relates to everything*. We are part of a large whole, and change in any part affects all others. For example, a drought in one area of the world, an earthquake in another, a shift in the jet stream over North America, a warming of an undersea current in the Pacific Ocean, a decision to drain some of Lake Superior to raise the water level elsewhere, a set of dams backing up a river so that power can be generated. These are all related. As are the motions of the sun, earth and moon. As are the actions we take on a daily basis and their consequences for each other and our environment.

When we choose to farm in a particular way and to plant certain crops we change the soil, which changes the quality of the water running through, which changes the content of the stream into which the water flows, which changes the life the stream can support. Choosing what to plant also changes what products will be available at market at what price, which influences what and how much consumers will purchase, which influences what forecasters see as economic trends, which influences investment and the interest rate on the loan to buy the seeds in the first place.

When we drive a gasoline-powered automobile we support an industry based on the extraction of a non-renewable energy source, we change the quality of the air, which effects our own health and that of the oxygen-producing plants we rely upon.

When we take a drug we alter the chemical balance of our body, which influences how we think and act, which changes how we relate to others.

When we pay attention to the speed limit or when we smoke a cigarette. When we recycle a bottle or when we make fun of someone just because he or she is different. Everything has an effect on something else, which has an effect on something else, and so on.

We can capture and better understand these sorts of interrelationships by identifying *systems*. We can speak of ecosystems to understand relationships in an environment. We can organize our bones into a skeletal system and our brain and nerves into a nervous system. We can say that certain parts of a car are in the fuel system while others are parts of the electrical system. We can even refer to the base-ten method of counting as a number system.

This can be very useful. For example, seeing how things relate as parts of systems can help us troubleshoot problems. But it's important to realize that what we call a system depends on how we look at it and why we do the looking. For a restaurant owner, a car can be a way to deliver pizzas (part of a transportation system). To a car dealer or gas station owner it is a source of income (part of an economic system). To police it represents a way to patrol a community and respond quickly to reports (part of a security system, relying on a communication system). We are the ones who make systems by calling them systems. And when we do so, we risk missing relationships that don't seem important to the purpose we have in mind. For example, we may think we can improve a system by making a change in a part, only to

find out afterward that the part we changed had an important role elsewhere.

This is understandable since we can't see all connections and we can't keep everything in mind at once. The important point to remember is that as hard as we try, and as good as our understanding gets, our actions will still often have consequences beyond what we imagine. Everything relates to everything.

A second concept that is important to understanding evolution is *diversity*. Yes, we know. You hear the term diversity thrown about all the time. Our companies are supposed to seek diversity in hiring employees. Our schools are supposed to support diversity of ideas. People setting aside money for the future are told that it's important to diversify their investments.

But why is diversity so important? It's not just political correctness. It turns out that both natural systems like ecosystems, and human-made systems like communities and organizations, depend on diversity to survive and develop. Following what is called the *law of requisite variety*, a system can adapt to change only when it has enough variety in its parts. If all the parts are the same—if they look the same and do the same things—then adapting to a change in the environment would require every single part to change at the same time. That's impossible. And the environment is constantly changing! So a business trying to diversify its workforce, or a school looking to diversify its faculty or student body, may be responding to political pressure. But in the long run this same action proves essential to its survival.

We are describing these principles because many of our actions over the past decades, whether they were individual habits, business practices, or governmental policies, violate them! We take actions that ignore the interdependent nature of the world. As a result, our actions have unexpected and, in many cases, dangerous consequences. We reduce rather than encourage diversity. For example, we allow the consolidation of power and wealth on a global scale and, therefore, reduce the ability of social and economic systems to adapt and survive. By gaining great influence and seeing the profound consequences of our actions, we have found out how little we understood about the world as we took these actions in the past. Now we understand them and have the opportunity to change.

Conscious evolution — changing on purpose

Evolutionary consciousness means that we understand how things change by evolutionary processes. Conscious evolution means that we use this understanding to purposely direct how change

occurs. We seem to be on the brink of doing this biologically. For example, we've gained the ability to make identical copies of animals by cloning, and we're learning how to grow replacement parts for humans in other animals. If we choose to support their development, changes that "improve" the human species will be with us soon. We face serious ethical issues here.

On the other hand, we already have the ability to do this culturally. We make choices that determine how we and others live. We choose certain relationships. We choose the form of the communities we live in. We create laws and bodies to enforce them. We choose certain political and economic structures over others. We create nations and boundaries. We develop technologies to serve human purposes. And so on. Not every action has significant consequences, and not everyone has the same influence. But as a species we have much ability to change the conditions in which we live. We now evolve by choice, and this has become a more powerful force for change than biology.

Our understanding of evolution combined with our ability to influence its direction gives us great responsibility. We now know that the future is up to us, and we can no longer pretend ignorance in taking or not taking actions. Consequently, this is a critical time in human history. History is full of examples of the resilience (ability to bounce back) of humans and the earth. All the signs indicate that such resilience now depends on us—on informed human action.

So, should we worry? Yes we should. Is worrying enough? Certainly not. We need to develop evolutionary consciousness, then use this to consciously evolve. The next two chapters are about evolutionary consciousness. Then Chapters 5 and 6 are about conscious evolution. To get started, we ask "How did we get here?"

Core Ideas of Chapter 2

2.1 We have gained an understanding of evolutionary processes. We now know a lot about how we came to be the way we are.

2.2 We also know that change was gradual over many thousands of years but recently has accelerated. The major evolutionary forces have shifted from biological to cultural.

2.3 A key understanding is that everything relates to everything. We are part of a large whole. Seeing

things as interdependent parts of wholes is important. For example, it shows us how actions in one area have consequences elsewhere.

2.4 We have also come to understand that further development depends on diversity.

2.5 We have gained great influence on our world and realize that we are causing harm. Our actions have caused environmental and social crises so large that our survival is in question.

2.6 Combined, our understanding and influence give us great responsibility—we now know that the future is up to us, and we can no longer pretend ignorance in taking or not taking actions.

2.7 Consequently, this is a critical time in human history when important choices need to be made.

Activities

Throughout the book we will suggest simple activities that will enrich your understanding of the concepts and principles we describe. We'll try to make them simple, short, and fun, so we hope you will give them a try. Here are a couple to get started.

A. Think of anything that happened to you in the last week. Ask yourself what could have caused it to occur. Then ask what caused those causes. Then ask what caused the causes of the causes. Everything relates to everything?

B. Pick up a newspaper and read any article about a governmental body making some sort of decision. Ask yourself what would happen if everyone in that body held the same opinions on all issues. Is diversity necessary? Why?